

# The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito

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**RARE ART OF BUDDHIST GRAND MASTER OPENS IN CHICAGO APRIL 8**  
*Exhibition Includes Premiere of Sculpture Never Seen By Public Outside Japan*

**At a glance**

- *The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito* presents about 100 rare artworks by renowned artist and Buddhist Grand Master Shinjo Ito. The exhibit is free and is on display April 8-May 1 at the Chicago Illuminating Company, 19 E. 21<sup>st</sup> St.
- The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito Information Center is open April 4-May 1 at 102 E. Oak St.
- A trolley will provide free roundtrip transportation from the art exhibit to the information center daily.
- In conjunction with the exhibit, free events will be hosted at the Chicago Illuminating Company. Visit [www.ShinjoIto.com](http://www.ShinjoIto.com) for a schedule of events and to register.

CHICAGO, March 27, 2008 — April 8 marks the first chance for Chicago residents and visitors to see *The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito*, a rare exhibition of art created by Shinjo Ito, a major Buddhist artist of Japan's Showa Era (1925-1989) and the founder of Shinnyo Buddhism. As part of a landmark world tour commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the artist's birth, Chicago is the second of only three U.S. destinations to host the exhibit. About 100 pieces of Shinjo Ito's artwork will be on view at the Chicago Illuminating Company in the South Loop through May 1.

Among the most significant pieces is the "Great Nirvana Aureole," a large-scale sculpture never before seen by the public outside of Japan. Within the circle of the Great Nirvana Aureole are five Buddha images: three representing wisdom and two representing compassion. The six Buddha images extending from the circle represent different levels of capacity in walking the path to enlightenment, showing that anyone is capable of achieving enlightenment. The halo on the Aureole represents light, which in Buddhism symbolizes virtue.

The Great Nirvana Aureole complements the masterpiece of the exhibition: the "Great Parinirvana Image," a 16-foot, gold-colored sculpture of a reclining Buddha about to enter "complete nirvana" at the end of his life. Completed in just three months in 1957 with the combined efforts of Shinjo Ito and his congregation, the Great Parinirvana Image is the artist's first major sculpture and his largest work of art. The presentation of these works together highlights the artist's unique perspective on the centuries-old Buddhist tradition.

## *The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito*

Artwork in the exhibition includes photographs, engravings, calligraphy, personal artifacts and sculptures. “This important exhibition gives U.S. audiences a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to gain insight into the heart and mind of a major Buddhist figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and one of Japan’s most revered spiritual leaders,” said Hiroko Sakomura, executive producer of the exhibition. “Shinjo Ito created devotional images based on a personal interpretation of scriptures, combining elements of traditional Buddhism with a fresh, modern approach.”



*Great Nirvana Aureole, 1957*

The sculptures in the exhibit reflect Shinjo Ito’s use of classical Greek aesthetics (similar to the first human-figured Buddhist art sculpted 2,000 years ago). In addition to the devotional works, *The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito* includes busts of the artist’s friends and family members. Prominent among them are sculptures of the artist’s two sons, both of whom died at an early age.

In Shinjo Ito’s own words: “What I seek to create is not just the physical form of a Buddha figure. My purpose for sculpting them is to inspire and motivate everyone to find the enlightened (Buddha) nature within their own selves and grow spiritually.”

*The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito* was previously displayed in five cities in Japan in 2006-2007 and was seen by more than 310,000 people. In early 2008, the exhibit was on display in New York, and it will travel to Los Angeles (May 8-June 29) after leaving Chicago. The Chicago exhibit is presented by a prestigious committee of Buddhist experts, academics, art curators and civic leaders:

- Mitsukuni Baba, Executive Director, The Japan America Society of Chicago
- Curt Hansman, Lecturer of Art and Art History, DePaul University
- Ann Harrington, Director of Asian Studies Program, Loyola University Chicago
- Gregory G. Knight, Deputy Commissioner of Visual Arts, City of Chicago, Department of Cultural Affairs
- Laura Lachman, Regional Event Director, Gen Art
- Katrina Markoff, Owner/Founder of Vosges Haut-Chocolat, a luxury chocolate maker
- Dr. Eboo Patel, Executive Director, Interfaith Youth Core

The exhibit is free and will be open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

## The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito Information Center

The Vision and Art of Shinjo Ito Information Center is opening at 102 E. Oak St. (just off Michigan Ave.) to provide information about the exhibit, offer a Buddhist library and host a boutique where guests can purchase related goods.

The information center will be open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Free trolley service is provided between the information center and the Chicago Illuminating Company from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday, through May 1.

For more information about the exhibit and the information center, please visit [www.ShinjoIto.com](http://www.ShinjoIto.com).



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**Editor's note:** Media materials, photos and video of the exhibit are available for download at [www.ShinjoItoChicago.org](http://www.ShinjoItoChicago.org).